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Viewing cable 97SOFIA3097, BULGARIA: BUILDING CONSENSUS AND FORMING A

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| Reference ID | Created | Released | Classification | Origin |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 97SOFIA3097 | 1997-05-08 14:44 | 2011-08-30 01:44 | CONFIDENTIAL | Embassy Sofia |

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 SOFIA 003097

E.O. 12958: DECL: 4/30/07
TAGS: [PREL](#) [BU](#)
SUBJECT: BULGARIA: BUILDING CONSENSUS AND FORMING A
GOVERNMENT

REF: SOFIA 2639

1.(U) CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR BOHLEN. REASON:
1.5(B,D).

2.(C) SUMMARY: BULGARIA'S UNION OF DEMOCRATIC FORCES (UDF), THE LEAD-PARTY IN THE COALITION WHICH WON THE APRIL 19 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, HAS SET TO WORK TO BUILD A STRATEGIC, REFORMIST MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT AND A BROAD CONSENSUS ON NATIONAL PRIORITIES OF ECONOMIC REFORM, LAW AND ORDER AND EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION, WHILE ALSO FORMING A NARROW COALITION GOVERNMENT DRAWN LARGELY FROM ITS OWN LEADERSHIP. THE NEW GOVERNMENT, TO BE LED BY UDF PARTY CHAIRMAN IVAN KOSTOV, WILL HAVE

AMPLE CONTINUITY WITH ITS CARETAKER PREDECESSOR AND WILL WILLINGLY TAKE PRESIDENT STOYANOV'S LEAD IN FOREIGN POLICY. A STREAMLINED PARLIAMENT, WHICH CONVENED ON MAY 7TH, WILL VOTE ON A 7-POINT DECLARATION OF NATIONAL PRIORITIES, PROPOSED BY THE UDF AND AMENDED THROUGH CONSULTATION WITH OTHER PARLIAMENTARY FACTIONS. THE UDF'S PARLIAMENTARY GROUP'S AGENDA INCLUDES PASSAGE, IN THE FIRST 30-40 DAYS, OF LAWS NECESSARY TO IMPLEMENT THE CURRENCY BOARD AND ADDITIONAL LEGISLATIVE MEASURES TO ADDRESS CRIME AND CORRUPTION. END SUMMARY.

FINAL ELECTION RESULTS

3.(U) FINAL ELECTION RESULTS (BELOW) WERE MUCH AS EXPECTED, GIVING THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC FORCES COALITION (UTD DF) A 137 SEAT MAJORITY IN THE 240-SEAT BULGARIAN PARLIAMENT. THE ELECTORAL SEA CHANGE FROM 1994 WHEN THE BULGARIAN SOCIALIST PARTY (BSP) WON 125 SEATS, WAS REFLECTED IN THE UTD DF'S INROADS INTO PREVIOUSLY BSP-DOMINATED RURAL AND ELDERLY ELECTORATES. FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE UTD DF OUTPOLLED THE BSP IN THE ETHNICALLY TURKISH AREA OF KURDJALI DOMINATED BY THE MOVEMENT FOR RIGHTS AND FREEDOM.

| | PERCENTAGE OF VOTES RECEIVED | NUMBER OF PARLIAMENTARY SEATS WON |
|---|------------------------------------|---|
| UNITED DEMOCRATIC FORCES (UTD DF) (COALITION LED BY UNION OF DEMOCRATIC FORCES, UDF) | 52.26 | 137 |
| DEMOCRATIC LEFT (COALITION LED BY BULGARIAN SOCIALIST PARTY, BSP) | 22.07 | 58 |
| ALLIANCE FOR NATIONAL SALVATION (COALITION LED BY MAINLY ETHNIC TURKISH MOVEMENT FOR RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS, MRF) | 7.60 | 19 |
| EURO-LEFT MOVEMENT | 5.50 | 14 |
| BULGARIAN BUSINESS BLOC | 4.93 | 12 |

THE 7.64 SHARE OF THE VOTE WON BY PARTIES NOT CROSSING THE 4 PERCENT THRESHOLD HAS BEEN ALLOCATED PROPORTIONALLY TO THE PARTIES THAT SURPASSED THE THRESHOLD, IN SOME CASES ACCORDING THEM ADDITIONAL SEATS.

SEEKING BROAD POLITICAL CONSENSUS...

4.(U) IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING ITS ELECTORAL VICTORY, THE UNION OF DEMOCRATIC FORCES TURNED ITS ATTENTION TOWARD ACHIEVING BROAD POLITICAL CONSENSUS FOR AN AGENDA OF ECONOMIC REFORM, LAW AND ORDER, AND EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION. SEEKING TO BUILD IN PARLIAMENT THE "REFORMIST MAJORITY" URGED BY PRESIDENT STOYANOV AND TO ENSURE THE DECLARED SUPPORT OF AS MANY PARLIAMENTARY FACTIONS AS POSSIBLE FOR THE TOUGH REFORMS AHEAD, THE UDF PARTY LEADERSHIP BEGAN CONSULTATIONS WITH ITS COALITION PARTNERS AND WITH ALL OTHER PARLIAMENTARY FACTIONS ON A FIVE-POINT DECLARATION OF NATIONAL CONSENSUS. TO THE UDF'S FIVE POINTS WERE ADDED TWO MORE: ONE CALLING FOR EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SOCIAL COSTS OF THE ECONOMIC REFORMS (AT THE REQUEST OF THE EURO-LEFT) AND THE OTHER, A COMMITMENT TO LAND RESTITUTION (AT THE REQUEST OF THE BULGARIAN AGRARIAN NATIONAL UNION).

5.(U) AS THE UDF ENTERED ITS SECOND ROUND OF CONSULTATIONS ON THE TEXT, THE DRAFT DECLARATION INCL
UDED THE FOLLOWING:

-- SUPPORT OF BULGARIA'S AGREEMENTS WITH THE

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, INCLUDING THE INTRODUCTION OF A CURRENCY BOARD AS A NECESSITY FOR ENSURING FOREIGN SUPPORT FOR BULGARIA'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY;

-- EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF THE BURDENS OF REFORM;

-- RESTITUTION OF LAND OWNERSHIP;

-- COMBATING ORGANIZED CORRUPTION AND CORRUPTION, REGARDLESS OF POLITICAL AFFILIATION, AT EVERY LEVEL AND IN EVERY BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT;

-- DECLASSIFYING THE POLICE FILES OF POLITICIANS, SENIOR MAGISTRATES AND STATE ADMINISTRATORS IN ORDER TO NEUTRALIZE THEIR DEPENDENCE ON THE FORMER SECURITY SERVICES;

-- BULGARIAN MEMBERSHIP IN THE EUROPEAN UNION; AND

-- BULGARIAN MEMBERSHIP IN NATO.

6.(C) (COMMENT: BARRING SUCH A DECLARATION, THE UDF FEARED THAT THE FEBRUARY CONSENSUS "ON THE PRINCIPLES FOR EMERGING FROM THE CRISIS," REACHED BY BULGARIA'S POLITICAL PARTIES, UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF PRESIDENT STOYANOV, MIGHT DISAPPEAR AT THE END OF THE CARETAKER CABINET'S TERM IN OFFICE, AND THAT THOSE NOW IN OPPOSITION MIGHT FIND IT POLITICALLY EXPEDIENT TO WITHDRAW SUPPORT FOR CONTINUATION BY THE NEW LEGISLATURE AND EXECUTIVE OF TOUGH REFORM-ORIENTED POLICIES. THE PROPOSED DECLARATION WILL BE VOTED ON SHORTLY FOLLOWING THE OPENING OF THE 38TH PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY ON MAY 17. UDF VICE CHAIRMAN AND NEWLY-ELECTED HEAD OF THE "BLUE" PARLIAMENTARY GROUP EKATERINA MIHAILOVA EXPECTS THAT A VOTE ON THE DECLARATION POINT-BY-POINT WILL ENSURE A HEALTHY, ALTHOUGH VARYING, REFORMIST MAJORITY FOR EACH ITEM.)

7.(C) WHILE THE SOCIALISTS CAN LEND THEIR SUPPORT TO A NUMBER OF POINTS IN THE UDF DECLARATION, BSP LEADER GEORGI PURVANOV HAS ALREADY ALSO DECLARED THAT IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY THE OPPOSITION WILL PROMOTE A REFERENDUM ON NATO MEMBERSHIP, SEEK TO LIMIT THE SOCIAL COST OF THE REFORMS, AND STRUGGLE AGAINST SEVERAL LIKELY CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS AND A REFERENDUM ON A RETURN OF MONARCHY. WHILE ALLIANCE FOR NATIONAL SALVATION LEADER AND KOSTOV-ANTAGONIST AHMED DOGAN HAS PERSONALLY FAILED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CONSULTATION PROCESS, OTHER ANS LEADERS HAVE PLEDGED SUPPORT FOR MOST OF THE DECLARATION'S POINTS. (COMMENT: ACCORDING TO UDF DEPUTY CHAIRMAN NADEZHDA MIHAILOVA, THE NEGOTIATING POSITIONS OF THE SMALLER PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS HAVE EVOLVED EXTENSIVELY OVER THE COURSE OF CONSULTATIONS. THIS IS NOT SURPRISING PARTICULARLY IN THE CASE OF THE ANS, A CATCHALL COALITION WITH NO UNIFYING IDEOLOGY.)

...UNDER A NARROW COALITION GOVERNMENT

8.(U) IN AN APRIL 24 MEETING OF THE UDF LEADERSHIP AND PARLIAMENTARY GROUP, THE PARTY FORMALLY NOMINATED ITS LEADER IVAN KOSTOV AS THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER AND SELECTED UDF DEPUTY CHAIRMAN EKATERINA MIHAILOVA AS LEADER OF THE "BLUE" PARLIAMENTARY GROUP, AND UDF EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEMBER AND FORMER PARLIAMENTARY GROUP LEADER IORDAN SOKOLOV AS PARLIAMENTARY CHAIRMAN. (THE UDF'S MAIN COALITION PARTNER, THE PEOPLE'S UNION WILL HAVE A SEPARATE PARLIAMENTARY GROUP, HEADED BY ANASTASIA MOZER AND STEFAN SAVOV.) KOSTOV WILL REMAIN HEAD OF UDF BUT HAS PROMISED A CLEAR DIVISION BETWEEN PARTY AND GOVERNMENT.

9.(C) WHILE THE UDF SEEKS BROAD POLITICAL CONSENSUS IN PARLIAMENT, KOSTOV IS FORMING A NARROW COALITION GOVERNMENT, DRAWING SOLELY ON THE THE ELECTORALLY VICTORIOUS UNITED DEMOCRATIC FORCES (UTD DF) COALITION IN NAMING HIS MINISTERS. IN FACT, ACCORDING TO

EKATERINA MIHAILOVA, WHILE KOSTOV WILL HONOR THE UDF'S PRE-ELECTORAL COMMITMENT TO SELECT ONE MINISTER FROM STEFAN SAVOV'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY (VESSELIN METODIEV AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE) AND ONE FROM ANASTASIA MOZER'S AGRARIANS (VENTSISLAV VERBANOV AS MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE), THE REMAINING CABINET MEMBERS WILL COME FROM THE UDF. A FAIR DEGREE OF CONTINUITY IS EXPECTED WITH THE CARETAKER GOVERNMENT, PARTICULARLY THROUGH THE CONTINUATION OF ALEXANDER BOZHKOV AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND BOGOMIL BONEV AS INTERIOR MINISTER. IT IS EXPECTED THAT KOSTOV MAY RETAIN GEORGI ANANIEV AS DEFENSE MINISTER (ALTHOUGH MP ASSEN AGOV CLAIMS TO BE IN THE RUNNING), AND WILL KEEP WILHELM KRAUS AS MINISTER OF TRANSPORT, IVAN NEIKOV AS MINISTER OF LABOR AND SOCIAL WELFARE, AND GEORGI STOILOV OVERSEEING THE ENERGY PORTFOLIO WHICH WILL BE DOWNGRADED TO A CABINET COMMITTEE. MIHAILOVA INDICATES THAT KOSTOV WILL DRAW HEAVILY ON THE UDF EXECUTIVE COUNCIL TO FILL OTHER MINISTERIAL POSITIONS. UDF DEPUTY CHAIRMAN NADEZHDA MIHAILOVA IS SLATED TO BECOME FOREIGN MINISTER. THE UDF'S COALITION PARTNERS ARE EXPECTED TO RECEIVE SOME DEPUTY MINISTER POSITIONS.

A NEW STYLE, A NEW SPIRIT AND HARMONY BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND PRESIDENT...

10.(C) "ANOTHER STYLE AND ANOTHER SPIRIT ARE COMING WITH US," UDF LEADER IVAN KOSTOV HAS PROMISED BULGARIANS, SIMILARLY TELLING PARLIAMENT'S MAY 7 OPENING SESSION OF HIS HOPE "TO CLOSE THE PAGE OF MEANINGLESS CONFRONTATION." NOT ONLY HAS THE ELECTION OF THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC FORCES INTRODUCED A NEW FOCUS ON DIALOGUE AND CONSENSUS IN THE PARLIAMENT, AS IMPLIED BY KOSTOV, IT ALSO USHERS IN A NEW ERA OF AGREEMENT AND COOPERATION BETWEEN THE BULGARIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE BULGARIAN PRESIDENT. GONE, AT LEAST AT THE ONSET, ARE THE BITTER STRUGGLES SEEN BETWEEN THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND PRESIDENT ZHELEV OVER FOREIGN POLICY, MILITARY MATTERS, AND CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES. KOSTOV HAS ALREADY PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED THAT FOREIGN POLICY UNDER HIS GOVERNMENT WILL BE FULLY CONSONANT WITH PRESIDENT STOYANOV'S PROGRAM. WE UNDERSTAND FROM VARIOUS SOURCES THAT KOSTOV AND STOYANOV HAVE REACHED AN AGREEMENT THAT STOYANOV WILL "GUIDE" FOREIGN POLICY, AN ARRANGEMENT LIKELY TO BE QUITE EFFECTIVE WITH THE INTELLIGENT, BUT RELATIVELY INEXPERIENCED IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, 35-YEAR-OLD MIHAILOVA AS FOREIGN MINISTER. KOSTOV HAS ALSO PROMISED THAT THE INCOMING EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATURE, UNLIKE THE SOCIALIST-LED ONES BEFORE THEM, "WILL LET THE JUDICIARY DO ITS JOB" WITHOUT INTERFERENCE (COMMENT: AN EASY PROMISE SINCE THE JUDICIARY IS GENERALLY THOUGHT TO BE PRO-UDF).

11.(C) ON THE QUESTION OF STYLE, THERE REMAINS ONE CAUTIONARY NOTE, HOWEVER. TO THOSE WHO KNOW HIM BEST, IVAN KOSTOV HAS TENDENCIES TOWARD THE AUTHORITARIAN, THE ARRÖGANT AND THE UNPREDICTABLE - A STYLE DIFFERENT FROM THE BROAD, TOLERANT APPROACH OF HIS POPULAR CARETAKER PREDECESSOR, STEFAN SOFIYANSKI. WHILE EARLY INDICATIONS ARE ENCOURAGING, KEEPING THESE TENDENCIES REINED IN WILL BE KEY TO KOSTOV'S SUCCESS IN MAINTAINING A STRATEGIC AND REFORMIST MAJORITY AND MANAGING PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS WHILE IMPLEMENTING TOUGH ECONOMIC REFORM.

PARLIAMENTARY AGENDA

12.(C) THE UDF HAS ALREADY TAKEN THE PARLIAMENT FIRMLY IN HAND, WITH PLANS TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES FROM 21 TO 14, IN MOST CASES MERGING THE LEAST ACTIVE INTO MORE IMPORTANT COMMITTEES. EKATERINA MIHAILOVA SAYS THAT THE UDF HAS PRIORITIZED ITS LEGISLATIVE AGENDA AND INDICATED EARLIER THAT PARLIAMENT WOULD PASS THE LAWS NECESSARY FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF THE CURRENCY BOARD WITHIN 30-40 DAYS.

IN AN UPDATE, NADEZHDA MIHAILOVA TOLD WESTERN AMBASSADORS ON MAY 7 THAT AFTER PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE FORMATION AND CONSIDERATION OF THE DECLARATION ON NATIONAL PRIORITIES, THE UDF HOPES TO FOCUS THE PARLIAMENT SOLELY AND INTENSIVELY ON THE CURRENCY BOARD SO THAT ALL NECESSARY LEGISLATION CAN BE PASSED BY MAY 16. THE NEXT LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY WILL BE WORK ON BILLS TO COUNTER CRIME AND COMBAT CORRUPTION. AT A LATER DATE, THE UDF HAS PROMISED TO HOLD A REFERENDUM ON WHETHER BULGARIA SHOULD BE A MONARCHY OR A REPUBLIC AND TO ADDRESS CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES (FOR EXAMPLE, THE CONSTITUTIONAL BAN ON FOREIGN OWNERSHIP OF LAND). (COMMENT: ACCORDING TO NADEZHDA MIHAILOVA, THE UDF INTENDS TO DELAY CONSIDERATION OF THESE MORE CONTENTIOUS ISSUES IN ORDER TO PRESERVE FOR SOME TIME THE BROAD POLITICAL CONSENSUS IT IS DEVELOPING.)

13.(U) PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE HEADS HAVE BEEN CHOSEN, AGAIN DRAWING FROM THE UDF, WITH ASSEN AGOV AS HEAD OF THE FOREIGN POLICY COMMITTEE (UNLESS HE IS GIVEN THE DEFENSE MINISTRY) AND UDF EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEMBER KHRISTO BISSEROV AS HEAD OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY COMMITTEE. DEPUTY PARLIAMENTARY HEADS WILL BE DRAWN FROM COALITION PARTNERS AND LIKE-MINDED PARTIES, AS IN THE SELECTION OF THE EURO-LEFT'S NIKOLAI KAMOV AS DEPUTY HEAD OF THE FOREIGN POLICY COMMITTEE. PARLIAMENTARY CHAIRMAN SOKOLOV WILL HAVE THREE DEPUTIES. ONE WILL BE HIS PREDECESSOR, BSP MP BLAGOVEST SENDOV. THE SECOND WILL BE THE PREVIOUS DEPUTY PARLIAMENTARY CHAIRMAN FROM THE UDF, IVAN KURTEV, AND THE THIRD WILL ROTATE AMONG THE REMAINING PARLIAMENTARY FACTIONS (THE EURO-LEFT'S PETYA SHOPOVA HAS THE FIRST TURN).

COMMENT

14.(C) THE UDF HAS MADE A STRONG START IN BUILDING A REFORMIST MAJORITY AS BROAD AS POSSIBLE. KOSTOV TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE IS PLEASED BY THE CONSENSUS HE IS FINDING, AND CLAIMED JOKINGLY TO BE WORRIED HE MIGHT NOT HAVE ANY OPPOSITION. EURO-LEFT LEADERS HAVE VOICED TO US THEIR GREAT SATISFACTION WITH THEIR NEGOTIATIONS WITH KOSTOV AND WITH THE POSITIVE RELATIONS HE IS FOSTERING WITH THEIR CAMP. HIS TALKS WITH THE MRF SEEM MORE CIRCUMSPECT ALTHOUGH ALLIANCE FOR NATIONAL SALVATION (ANS) CO-CHAIRMAN DIMITUR LUDZHEV HAS SAID PUBLICLY THAT, DESPITE THE ANS'S STAND THAT BULGARIA DOESN'T NEED A CURRENCY BOARD, THERE IS NO ITEM IN THE PROPOSED 7-POINT DECLARATION THAT THE ANS CAN'T SUPPORT. BUSINESS BLOC LEADER GEORGE GANCHEV HAS DECLARED THAT THE BUSINESS BLOC WILL BACK ALMOST ALL OF THE DECLARATION POINTS, WHILE REMAINING IN THE OPPOSITION, AND EVEN THE SOCIALIST PARTY HAS CONSULTED PRODUCTIVELY WITH THE UDF ON QUESTIONS OF THE SOCIAL COSTS AND THE RATE OF REFORM. EVEN IF SOME OF THIS COOPERATION FALLS AWAY AFTER THE INITIAL DAYS, KOSTOV HAS A SOLID BASE WITH WHICH TO WORK.

BOHLEN